



Snippets

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Balnarring and District Historical Society Inc.

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LIVIN' IN THE '70S

by Beth Cooper

[Beth and Peter Cooper's first contact with Balnarring and Balnarring Beach was in 1975. It was a love of sailing that first drew the family to the area.

Repeated weekend trips and increasing involvement with the Western Port Yacht Club lead them into buying a house at Balnarring Beach and, eventually, retiring there.]

Peter had acquired a sailing boat which he learned, was popular at Westernport Yacht Club. He joined the fleet and had many happy summer weekends over the next years upgrading, racing and enjoying the camaraderie, as did our three children, all of whom began sailing individually and loving it! In later years we bought a trailer-sailer for family cruising at home and away.



Balnarring Beach became the "go to" family destination. We loved the unspoiled nature of the Coastal Village, most of which consisted of modest holiday cottages, one of which we purchased in 1980. Thereafter, year

round, weekends at Balnarring were our escape from the working week and a place where we socialised with other families similarly drawn here. Many long and dear friendships began here and continue to this day through the next generation.

When our children weren't sailing they were "roaming" the foreshore areas and surrounds, and enjoying social functions provided by the Yacht Club. An altogether idyllic childhood.

The Village of Balnarring consisted of one General Store - a sprawling weatherboard structure, surrounded by vacant, rather barren scrub at the junction of Balnarring Road and Frankston-Flinders Road. At the beach, a new store had been built, which carried basic stock for weekends.

In 1989, as the children were engaging in study and careers away from home (Mt Eliza), we decided that Balnarring Beach was our forever place. We sold the holiday cottage - it was transported in sound condition to Gippsland, and built our current home where we have been living happily for the past 35 years.

Much has changed in the immediate area, as in Upper Balnarring. However, there remains a gentleness and a common sense of "ownership" of our lovely beachside haven.

We were instrumental in setting up the (Balnarring Beach) Ratepayers' Association, the principal goal of which was to conserve the natural character and to protect the foreshore ecology. The present Community Association is a later evolution of the concept.

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF GEORGINA OSWIN

April 12th - 18th 1897

Georgina Oswin kept a diary in which she recorded day-to-day happenings at the Oswin property, 'Newstead' in Merricks North.

Monday was always "wash day", a chore that could take all day if Georgina had no help with that task.



[N.B. John
is her

husband. Willie and Dick are sons while Hettie, Fanny, Ethel and Olive are daughters.]

Monday 12 April: *I washed the clothes. Fanny rinsed and hung out. Got a pain in my side. Very windy this morning. Got some of my plants broken. Mr Shand better, Went home. John and Dick took sheep to the Inlet. Willie, Hettie, Fanny went down to Coles to hear Miss Pollock play the fiddle.*

Tuesday 13: *Showery today. Fanny did some ironing. I made a flannel for Dada and began another one. The Girls gone out somewhere. Got a note from Sawyers to say the bullock got away. Fanny christened the calves, one is Josephine and the other Harry. Children went to school. Olive came home with a sore heel. Willie and John putting up wire netting.*

Wednesday 14: *I made Ethel's dress. Kept her home today to fit it on. Dick went by himself. John took 13 sheep down to Lower Paddock. Hetty went with the trap and brought a sheep home to kill. Willie put up the wire netting. Fanny ironing. They went to Red Hill last night. Felt pretty cross about it. Got a letter from Anne Stoke.*

Thursday 15: *Ethel and Dick went to school. They have a week's holiday. I made some of the flannel shirts. Mr Kane here for tea. Bertha came for the eggs. Gave her 5 dozen of Mr Tullis and 8 of mine. I went over and paid Mrs Tullis. Got 14 pence. John and Willie putting up the wire netting.*

Good Friday 16: *Balnarring and Mornington playing. Our boys beat. Fanny and Hetty went down. Fanny got some flowers at Warrawee. John digging potatoes. Him and Dick went around Parkers. Dick rode pony. I mended Olive's petticoat and did a bit of the square.*

Saturday 17: *Willie ploughed a bit of ground for potatoes. He went to Tullis in the afternoon to put up the wire netting. John and Dick went to Lower Paddock to look for Daisy [a cow]. She is sick. Could not find her. They got some rabbits with the ferret. I had a bath. John very bad in the night. I got ginger and hot flannels. Olive got trots. So has Hetty. Grandfather bad too. Mrs Tullis came over in the evening.*

Sunday 18: *I have a bad head this morning. took some salts. John better. Hetty still bad. Jim White here. Had to move all my plants again for the wind. John, Fanny and Ethel went to church. Head preached. He brought some beautiful autumn leaves*

A FAREWELL FOR THE BALMAINS

from the *Frankston & Somerville Standard*. Friday, 11 February 1921

BALNARRING; On January 28th, Major and Mrs J Balmain, of Coolart Station, gave a farewell evening in the form of a concert and dance in the Balnarring Hall. A good deal of work had been done by Mrs Balmain and her assistants to make the evening a success and they were greatly rewarded for their efforts. The hall was most tastefully decorated with the flags of the different nations, with the flags of England and Australia well to the fore. The concert, which was wholly town talent, was appreciated very much for it is not often that the district is favored with a full programme from the city. The whole evening, from start to finish, was a huge success and everybody went home very thankful for the pleasant evening. Messrs D. Buckley, L.J. Berryman and J Davis spoke in very high terms of the good Major and Mrs Balmain had done for the district and expressed their regret that such good people should be leaving not only Balnarring but Australia, but hoped they would enjoy a long life in England where they are now going

to reside. Mr Watson also bid bon voyage on behalf of the residents of Bittern. Major Balmain, in responding, thanked the speakers for their kind words but said he was but paying back the kindness that had been shown to him and his wife since they came to Balnarring. They were sorry to leave the district as they had had an enjoyable time in Balnarring and had lived very happily amongst the people. He hoped Balnarring would continue to prosper as it had in the past.

After supper, dancing was carried on until a late hour (an early hour rather) to the music of Miss Romeo of Hastings.

Captain Balmain took possession of Coolart after the Easter of 1910

The property had been bought, on his behalf, by his father-in-law, George Fairbairn, while Balmain was in India. Balmain was a career military person, a British officer with the 15th Kings Own Hussars. He served overseas with the British army during World War I. During their time at Balnarring the Balmain family became involved with the Balnarring community, especially through St Mark's Anglican Church. They were moving to Britain in order to place their young sons in school. Unhappily, Alison Balmain was to die shortly after the family arrived in England, leaving not only her young two sons but a baby daughter.

TOM LUXTON'S VISION FOR COOLART

In September 1937 the Coolart property changed hands for £13,518. Initially, it had been offered for auction in February of that year and was passed in at £13,300. The new owner was Thomas Luxton, a businessman well known in Melbourne circles. The hardware chain, McEwans had been established by his father, also named Thomas, who had bought two smaller hardware businesses, one in 1907 and the other in 1910 and had amalgamated them to form one company. Thomas Luxton Snr took over the role of chairman of the new company and his four sons. were the directors. When Thomas Snr. died in 1911, two of his sons, Harold and Thomas Jnr were left with the full responsibility of running a big business.

In 1908 Tom Jnr had married Gertrude Christian at St Georges Church in Malvern. The couple established their home, 'Chilterns', in Glenferrie. They also had a holiday house 'Tintagel' at Canadian Bay.

Coolart, Luxton's new property, was good grazing country. It had been carefully managed over the years and John Feehan, the previous owner, had bred horses but for Tom Luxton the main attraction was its abundance of wildlife, especially birds associated with wetlands. Coolart's lagoon system and marshlands attracted a number of different species. He already knew the property's attractions, having been a donor to and supporter of the Lord Somers Camp in its early days. The camp had been established on a corner of the property by the governor of Victoria, Lord Somers, on land donated by Feehan and Tom Luxton had been a visitor.

Once the title was in his name, one of Luxton's first steps was to have the property declared a Wild Life Sanctuary. Accordingly, in October 1937 a notice appeared in the Victorian Government Gazette under the heading *"Sanctuary for native game, except quail, at Coolart Estate, Balnarring"*, proclaiming the estate a sanctuary.



In 1938 Tom, his wife Gertrude with two of their children, Peter and Margaret, moved into the late-19th century 'Big House' on the property. Their elder daughter, Elizabeth, had recently married. Luxton set about improving the habitat at Coolart to attract bird life. Described as a man of medium height who wore glasses and had a ready smile, Luxton was often seen in overalls and gumboots working to achieve his vision of creating a significant wetlands area. He frequently exchanged ideas with like-minded schoolteacher, Howard Francis who was living with his family in the weatherboard cottage on the estate. Francis advised him to "establish the environment and the birds will follow". Luxton had constructed a small bird hide where they could observe the bird life, take counts and plan future measures. Trees were planted and ground cover, the lagoons extended and islands created in the lagoon where birds could roost and nest without being preyed upon by foxes. A larger bird hide was constructed. In time the ibis came and began to breed.



1938 During a dry season, work is carried out on the lagoon.

A systematic survey of the bird population carried out in 1936 showed 103 different kinds of birds of which 76 were native birds with 26 breeding on site. A later survey showed these numbers had increased. Recent estimates are around 125 different species. The first ibis to breed there were sighted in 1961 and the numbers mounted steadily throughout the 1960s from six pairs in 1961 to 420 nestings recorded in 1967. A report by 'Ovens' in the 'Pastoral Review' of February 19, 1968 states: "For many years Mr Luxton has been an ardent conservationist of bird life and has created a unique sanctuary on his property . . . The secluded habitat attracts all manner of ducks, as well as Spoonbills, Cormorants, Dotterels and many other water birds. One of the islands is the site of what is believed to be one of the only two ibis rookeries in Southern Victoria, the birds coming to breed each year. ". Both sacred and straw-necked ibis were seen on the lagoon.

Luxton had introduced several Cape Barren geese in the 1950s but they were taken by foxes. Although some returned in the 1990s none have bred there. Black swans have also been sighted there as have Tom Luxton's favourite Eastern Swamp Hens which he described as "perky little coots".

The Pastoral Review also reported that "Mr Luxton allowed the Victorian Ornithological Research Group to conduct regular surveys on his lagoon while every year many children visit the sanctuary."

Bryan Francis, a pupil at the Somers School, recalls their annual visit to Coolart. "After a brief history of the property and a tour of the buildings, the

bakery, shearing sheds and stables it was down to the lagoons. Dad (Bryan's father was the teacher at Somers) would speak first, backgrounding us on the birds in residence, their nesting habits and the vast distances flown from Asia and Europe to nest at Coolart.

Mr Luxton would follow with his vision for the property. A hope that Coolart would become an important and appreciated sanctuary . . . " Luxton went on to outline the work that needed to be done and his belief that ibis would eventually nest at Coolart."



Tom Luxton's hopes and beliefs have eventuated. Eight years after his death 220 acres of the Coolart estate was purchased by the Victorian State Government. Today Luxton Lagoon and Wetlands is now under the management of Parks Victoria and is recognized as one of the significant and major bird sanctuaries in the State.

Information from:- Bright Eyed and Bushy Tailed by Bryan Francis;
Coolart, a Short History by John Webb,
The Pastoral Review and Graziers' Record

February 19, 1968 p 100

Punch, Thursday 13 August 1908, p 28

Australian Dictionary of Biography

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